

## Constellations

By Julia Sevy

### Constellations

I remember lying on our backs staring at the light spitting from the small holes in the night-light shaped like a turtle at our feet. We were in my room, on my squishy mattress covered in grey sheets that my mother told me not to buy because in her words, “they will make your room look like a boy’s room.” I bought them anyway. The turtle was a present from a friend and in complete darkness it paints constellations and a crescent moon on the ceiling and walls, projecting green, blue, and amber light from deep within. Instead of searching for specific constellations, we lay there, his fingers intertwined with mine, staring above at the complete picture.

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We like to make meaning out of things. We like to make shapes out of the stars in the sky and create elaborate stories about how they got there. We like to name them and to spot them on clear nights, and to dedicate certain ones to people with a piece of paper as proof. We like to set up telescopes on the slanted roofs of our houses and point them at circles of fire to get closer, as close as we can to the beautiful unknown.

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It is firm and surprisingly round to the touch. It is situated on the left middle of the neck, just under the jaw. It is visible to the eye if you know about it, but it isn't something you'd notice if you weren't aware. There are three similar ones, smaller in size, on the opposite side, the right shoulder, lined in a perfect row. I think of those as Orion's belt, easy to identify with a clear and organized structure. Orion was a supernaturally strong hunter, son of Poseidon and Euryale, who threatened to kill every animal on the planet. I never have any trouble finding Orion's belt in the sky, even through the polluted Los Angeles air that I call home. I am careful not to press too hard on the bumps on his right shoulder though because he says they hurt.

I imagine the larger, spherical one on the left side of the neck to be the mighty sun. Its firm rays commanding power, controlling light, creating life. Visible, it is the center of everything and the strongest, most beautiful thing capable of infinite destruction. Revered and feared.

The small things in his liver I cannot see. They would be Ursa Minor, or the Little Dipper. I can never find the Little Dipper. I'm always searching, eyes wandering furiously, while someone points their finger up at what to me is just dark space. I nod my head and usually lie, saying that I found it, although most times I never do. Searching and searching, my eyes get tired of something they cannot see.

And the small pieces in his chest are the rest of the stars, various constellations, each with a story explaining their origins. There is Hercules the hero, Draco the dragon (who used to

include the North Pole star), Canis Major-The Greater Dog, whose dog tag is Sirius, the brightest star in the sky, and of course Pegasus, the horse with wings. Radiating and twinkling, these shapes slightly protrude from his skin and the sky. And they bring stories to the unknown. They connect us to things so much larger, making us feel relevant, comforting us, when realistically, scientifically even, we can look up at the vast sky and truly know how small we are.

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These bumps are uncontrolled growths. They are somewhat unknown and some are easier to find than others, but they are not beautiful. I can romanticize them; I can dream; I can imagine his body as a dark canvas and the bumps as beautiful constellations, but it's important to remember that it isn't, and they aren't.

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He was diagnosed in 2012. And the bumps are still here. They are like a stalker that won't leave you alone, like a mold problem that you just can't get rid of, or like that strand of hair that you know you feel grazing your arm, but that you just can't seem to find to pull off. They are relentless and they do not know exhaustion.

He doesn't care that the hair on his head will fall out. It has fallen out before. He doesn't care that the hair on his face will soon be gone. It wasn't there before. But his eyebrows bother him. Eyebrows make us look human. Have you ever seen a picture of a person without their eyebrows? Freaky, right? He wishes he could keep his eyebrows. But I only wish he could keep them because he does.

Every 3 weeks he'll be gone for a week, getting poison pumped into his veins to kill what's inside of him. And I stay, scared, waiting for him to return. It's difficult to understand that he must get sicker to get better. It's counterintuitive; I can't wrap my brain around it. It isn't beautiful.

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There is a map of the constellations pasted on the wall in his bathroom. It sits above a brown cabinet with two drawers. I stare at it every time I'm there, studying the arrows and curves that paint the universe as an entity of connection, when realistically, man created these dotted lines in arbitrary, meaningless ways. But we like to make meaning out of things. We like to point telescopes at spheres of fire and tell stories about how they got there. We like to spot them on clear nights to feel closer to the unknown.

I am searching for meaning in a time of darkness, but it isn't as hopeful or romantic as the stories of the heroes in the night sky. It isn't as beautiful as the twinkling lights that set fire to the dark canvas above us. At least not yet.

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The story of Icarus goes something like this: He wore wings of feathers and wax. His father cautioned him about flying too high or too low. However, Icarus dared to fly too close to the sun, which melted the wax, breaking his wings, causing him to drown. Within this story, the sun transforms from a beautiful, brilliant creator, into a destructor, an evil, an entity with power too great. It is uncontrollable. But then again, maybe the uncontrolled risk of destruction *is* beautiful.

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I am trying to make meaning out of his constellations. I am trying to see the beauty in an ugly world. I am trying to set my telescope up on my slanted roof and point it at something bright, something hopeful. I am trying to make my own constellation, my own story as to how I got here, how we got here. I am trying to see the beauty in darkness.

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It is 10:35 at night and our noses touch like the way we think Eskimos' do when they kiss. It is colder out, although leaves still furiously cling to branches, eager to spend at least one more second alive. It is foggy and I can't see the stars. But our lips gently brush and I place my right hand on the left side of his warm neck. As we sit on the tiny, blue couch in the center of the space, I feel the sun, warm and fiery, under my palm on his neck. I look to his right shoulder at Orion's Belt and see a perfect line of small bumps in his skin. I think about Ursa Minor's beauty in his liver and Hercules and Pegasus twinkling together in his chest. But in this second, I try not to worry about the unknown—it may be beautiful, it may be destructive, and it may be both. Instead, I focus on this moment and give him another "Eskimo kiss."

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**Julia Sevy is a passionate dancer and creative writer who recently graduated from Brown University (2014).**

